

The Two Pillars of the Bible

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[0 : 0 0] Amen. Amen. Thank you. Very good. Well, now we come to our Bible reading, the Word of the Lord. Let's turn to the prophet Amos, chapter 9, and you'll find that chapter on page 770 in our hardback church Bibles, page 770.

Oh, this is the last chapter of the book of Amos, as you can see. And as I read, ask yourself what might be extraordinary about this final chapter.

So the prophet Amos, chapter 9. I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and he said, Strike the capitals until the thresholds shake and shatter them on the heads of all the people.

And those who are left of them I will kill with the sword. Not one of them shall flee away. Not one of them shall escape. If they dig into shale, from there shall my hand take them.

If they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down. If they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, from there I will search them out and take them. If they hide from my sight at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them.

[1 : 2 9] And if they go into captivity before their enemies, there I will command the sword, and it shall kill them. And I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good.

The Lord God of hosts, he who touches the earth and it melts, and all who dwell in it mourn, and all of it rises like the Nile and sinks again like the Nile of Egypt, who builds his upper chambers in the heavens and founds his vault upon the earth, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out upon the surface of the earth.

The Lord is his name. Are you not like the Cushites to me, O people of Israel, declares the Lord? Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Kaphtor, and the Syrians from Kir?

Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the surface of the ground, except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, declares the Lord.

For behold, I will command and shake the house of Israel among all the nations, as one shakes with a sieve, but no pebble shall fall to the earth. All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, who say, Disaster shall not overtake or meet us.

[2 : 5 0] In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen, and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the nations who are called by my name, declares the Lord who does this.

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes, him who sows the seed.

The mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them.

They shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them, says the Lord your God.

Amen. May this be a blessing to us this evening. Well, do let's turn to the prophet Amos again, chapter 9 on page 770.

[4 : 01] My title for tonight is The Twin Pillars of the Bible.

The twin pillars, the two great doctrines which support the whole of the Bible's teaching about God, are the salvation of God, and the judgment of God.

God is the one who saves. God is the one who judges. And Amos chapter 9 is an extraordinary chapter, because it puts right together a frightening passage about the judgment of God on his people Israel, in the first part of the chapter, and a glorious passage about the restoration of God's people in the final few verses.

And so we might be forgiven for thinking, how can Amos, with integrity, put these two passages slapped together in one chapter? How can it be true that God is announcing the destruction of his people and the restoration of his people simultaneously?

Well, the answer, of course, is that the people whose destruction is announced in the first part of the chapter are not the same people as the ones whose salvation is announced in verses 11 to 15.

[5 : 25] They're two different groups, the judged, the condemned, and the saved, as they are, of course, right the way through the Bible. But God is holding these two realities together in Amos chapter 9, his judgment and his salvation, to help us to see that he is both the judge of the unrepentant and the savior of those who welcome his lordship.

And as we work our way through the passage this evening, I hope we'll see, and not only see but feel, something of the terror of God's destructive power and something of the delight of his power to provide for his people's eternal joy.

One reason why the Bible is presented to us in such vivid detail is that we're not very much helped by bland statements. If Amos had just said, the Lord is the judge and the Lord is the savior, amen, I guess we would have said, of course, we can't disagree with that.

But we wouldn't have been much the wiser for it. Words like that don't make a lot of impression upon us. But the vivid details that we have in a chapter like this press home the truth into our naturally dull hearts.

Amos wakes us up. The first half of the chapter will force us to realize how terrible and terrifying God's judgment is, how much it is to be feared. And the final verses of the chapter will show us how much more delightful the salvation of God's people is than we might have dared to imagine.

[7 : 00] Because of our frailty, our humanness and our sinfulness, we don't like to face up to the severity of God's judgment. And equally, we can be dull to the wonders of his salvation.

The power of the Bible's teaching about heaven and hell doesn't often penetrate our systems deeply because we're dull. But it needs to and we need it to. And a chapter like this forces us to realize that God is both more severe than we had imagined and more kind than we had thought possible.

Judgment and salvation, the twin pillars of the Bible. Now I've got three sections for this evening. First, there is no hiding from the God of truth.

Chapter 9 begins with an appalling vision. It's a bit like a nightmare. Look with me at verse 1. I saw the Lord standing beside the altar. Now this is not the first time in Amos that Amos has had a vision of the Lord.

If you turn back a page to chapter 7, verse 7, you'll see there that it was another vision. And the Lord there was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line.

- [8 : 11] There he was measuring Israel. He appears to Amos in human form, obviously as a human figure at this point. But he's measuring Israel with this plumb line, testing the character of the people to see whether they were straight or crooked.
- But now in chapter 9, the Lord has finished his measuring and his examining. And he declares here in verse 1, strike the capitals until the thresholds shake and shatter them on the heads of all the people.
- And those who are left of them, I will kill with the sword. Not one of them shall flee away. Not one of them shall escape. So it seems as though the prophet Amos is in a temple or certainly a place of worship with pillars supporting it.
- And it's obviously full of people. It's a little bit like that great moment towards the end of Judges when Samson brings down the temple of Dagon on the Philistine idolaters.
- But here, it's not a powerful man like Samson. It's an all-powerful God who commands the slaughter. Also, the tops of the pillars, the capitals, are to be struck so that the whole building collapses on everybody.
- [9 : 19] And if anybody should escape the collapsing building, the Lord assures Amos that they will be killed with the sword. Not one. Just notice the repetition, which is there for emphasis towards the end of the verse.
- Not one of them shall flee away. Not one of them shall escape. And then notice the Lord's determined pursuit of all who are his enemies. Verse 2 is really like a nightmare.
- One of those nightmares where you're trying to flee away from some terrifying pursuer, but you simply can't get away. First of all, in verse 2, there are people with shovels or spades and they're frantically digging down into the soil, trying to create a tunnel to take them right down to Sheol, the place of the dead, as if Sheol might offer them safety.
- But Sheol is no refuge, because as the verse puts it, from there shall my hand take them. The hand of the righteous judge reaches down through this pathetic tunnel that they've built and extracts them and brings them up to judgment.
- There are others, still in verse 2, who are going the other way. They're trying to climb up into heaven, to some remote place, higher than the skies. But the pursuing hand reaches up for them and brings them down to face the judgment.
- [10 : 36] So there is no supernatural refuge, no refuge in Sheol or in heaven for those who have turned their backs on the Lord. But equally, there's no geographical refuge for them either.
- Look at verse 3. They might try and flee to the top of Mount Carmel. Carmel was one of the highest mountains in Israel, rather as we might speak of Ben Nevis or Ben Lomond. They might try to go up there, try and find a cave or a sheltering rock on the top of Carmel.
- But there's no protection there, because God says, from there I will search them out and take them. Notice that verb, search them out. Pursue them relentlessly.
- Or, says verse 3, they might get into a submarine or a diving bell and go down to the bottom of the ocean. But can they escape God there? Of course not. Because God says, I will command a sea serpent, and it shall bite them.
- There's no supernatural refuge. There's no geographical refuge. And in verse 4, there is no political refuge. They might be captured by an enemy army.
- [11 : 41] And they might think, I shall get away from God here. I'm going to be taken miles away, perhaps to Assyria. Maybe I'll find safety by being a prisoner of war. But no, even there, says the Lord, I will command the sword, and it shall kill them.
- And look at that fearful phrase at the end of verse 4. I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good. If the Lord has fixed his eyes upon a sinner, a rebel, who has hated him, that sinner faces a fearful and inescapable final destiny.

And then verses 5 and 6 add an immeasurable weight to the visions of the first four verses. The learned commentaries on Amos say that it's quite likely that verses 5 and 6 are part of an ancient hymn in praise of the God of Israel.

And Amos could well have been in the shrine, the place of worship, when he has this vision of the Lord standing beside the altar. So it could be that while Amos is having this nightmare vision of the Lord pursuing and catching the rebels, the temple choir, or perhaps the whole congregation, were singing this hymn.

And if that's the case, the hymn does nothing but add majesty and power to the vision of the Lord as the judge. Because verses 5 and 6 are all about God, the almighty creator and ruler of the cosmos.

[13 : 08] In verse 5, he's the author of volcanoes. He touches the earth and it melts. You can picture the lava running down the mountains, can't you?

He's the author of earthquakes in verse 5. All who dwell in it mourn. All of it rises like the Nile and sinks again. That's what happens with an earthquake, like the Nile of Egypt.

And verse 6, he has built his upper chambers in the heavens and has founded his vault upon the earth. It's poetic language for saying that everything is the work of his mighty hand.

And he's the Lord of the oceans. He calls for the waters of the sea in verse 6 and pours them out upon the surface of the earth. The Lord is his name. Well, if he is all that verses 5 and 6 make him out to be, the Lord of the earth and the skies and the very depths of the oceans, he's more than able to carry out the pursuits and the captures of verses 3 and 4.

Of course there can be no hiding place on the earth or under the water from the one who made the earth and controls the tides. Do you wish that perhaps these verses were not there?

[14 : 22] Do you wish that God was less severe, less relentless, less determined to bring to justice every last potential refugee from his justice?

Well, let me say this, friends. Don't take offense at him for showing his hand like this. We need to see it. He purposefully put these words into the mouth of Amos.

Amos speaks for him. Amos is a prophet. These words are God's words. The Lord didn't get Amos just to say something very brief and bland, such as, the Lord is the universal judge.

Now, it's much more. He gets Amos to picture rebellious Israelites digging with shovels, running up mountainsides in their terrified flight from the Lord. He makes Amos picture rebels in their terror, trying to get to the bottom of the sea, only to be bitten to death by a terrifying sea snake.

This vivid imagery is here so as to force our naturally dull brains to feel something of the terror of the Lord's judgment. It's not enough for us to say as a matter of creedal orthodoxy, I believe that God is the judge.

[15 : 31] We need to learn and to feel how terrifying is his judgment and that's one reason why this passage is written like this. And let's remember who these people are in the book of Amos who are about to be judged like this.

These people are Israelites. The people who throng the places of worship. People who are calling on the name of Yahweh, the God of Israel. The problem was that although they were keeping the outward forms of Israelite worship, their hearts were elsewhere.

Their hearts were wrapped around other things. If you look back thoughtfully over the eight chapters of Amos before this chapter, you can see how these Israelites are breaking all ten of the Ten Commandments every day.

I won't try and demonstrate that now because time is short, but that's what was happening. They'd become hedonists, luxuriating in delicate foods and wines and perfumes, while at the same time grinding the heads of the poor into the dust, robbing the poor so as to enrich themselves in terms of money and property.

They went in large numbers to worship, but as we saw in chapter 8, verse 5, their only thought when they were in church was to get out of church as fast as possible so that they could get back to the market and make more money dishonestly.

[16 : 54] They were hedonists, they were materialists, they were money lovers who didn't care a brass farthing for the ruinous spiritual state of the people of Israel. So it's crucial for churches today, not simply those who are not Christians, but for churches to take warning from the book of Amos.

The people of God can decline rapidly from true worship and true godliness to a state where the words of Bible faith and the outward forms of Christian worship can be retained, but the hearts of men and women become entangled with other things, material things, food and drink, beautiful bodies, fat bank balances.

When a church is always talking about money and health, you know you're not far from the situation in Amos' Israel. Still talking about the God of the Bible, but no longer loving the God of the Bible.

Just turn back for a moment to chapter 3, if you will. Chapter 3, verses 1 and 2, where the Lord tells the Israelites why he's singling them out for punishment.

Chapter 3, verse 1, Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt. You only have I known of all the families of the earth.

[18 : 18] Therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities. Of all the world's nations, the Israelites were uniquely privileged. The Lord had adopted them and chosen them and rescued them from slavery.

They were the family. Adoption, election, salvation. Remember those three words that we looked at a few weeks back? And he had made known his heart to them. Through the prophet Moses, he had told them everything that they needed to know.

Through Moses, he had told them who he was and how they should live for him and how they should keep him as the great joy and delight and love of their hearts. But their hearts had become hard and calloused over and encrusted.

They had turned to immorality and idolatry and the worship of money and luxury. But surely, Edward, this could never happen at the Tron church, could it?

I mean, we're a Bible church. Of course, this could happen to the Tron church. This was a Bible Israel. But when the shepherds of Israel, the kings, went astray, the sheep went astray with them and in the end, the Lord had to become their enemy.

[19 : 29] And turning back to chapter 9, he had to say these terrifying words to them. In chapter 9, verse 4, I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good. So friends, let's be warned by this.

We must look after our church and other churches too, but our church is our prime responsibility. We must watch out for each other. And if we see each other beginning to worship at the shrine of money or luxury or the body beautiful or any of the other gods of this world, let's, if necessary, be tough with each other.

We sometimes need to say to each other, come on brother or sister, stop it. Dismantle your idol. Burn down your shrine. Love the Lord, your God. Love his son, Jesus Christ.

Cherish the eternal future. Don't go running after insubstantial earthly things that turn to dust as soon as you grasp them. Remember Amos' Israelites. Remember that God had said to them, not one of them shall escape.

So we must remind ourselves and each other that God will bring to judgment those who profess to love him but have actually hardened their hearts against him.

[20 : 40] There is no hiding place from this God of truth. Now second, there's no protection in the exodus of long ago.

This brings us to verse 7 which is quite a tricky verse and we could easily misunderstand it. Let me read it out. Are you not like the Cushites to me of people of Israel declares the Lord?

Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt and the Philistines from Kaphtor and the Syrians from Kir? Let's have some geographical observations first. The Cushites were the Ethiopians.

The land of Cush was roughly what we call Ethiopia today. Perhaps a bit of Somalia, a bit of Sudan but that northeastern part of Africa. Then the Philistines are mentioned. They had settled in Gath and Gaza, more or less the Gaza Strip as we now know it.

But they were originally from Kaphtor which was an old name for the island of Crete. But they'd migrated from Crete to that southwestern corner of Israel. And the Syrians mentioned there before they colonized Syria had lived for a time in Kier, K-I-R.

[21 : 51] And nobody knows where Kier was but it wasn't Syria because the point is that the Syrians had also been a migrant people. They'd moved from Kier to Syria. Now looking at this verse you can understand why some people have said that this verse means that the Lord is so disenchanted with Israel that he's ending the covenant with them.

as if he's saying from now on Israel you mean no more to me than the Ethiopians. And as for your migration from Egypt to the land of Canaan there's nothing special about that because I also caused the Philistines to migrate from Kaphtor to their present territories and I brought the Syrians to Syria from Kier.

So don't think that you're special to me any longer. Now the Lord cannot be saying that the covenant is ended. If the covenant were being ended the Lord couldn't possibly go on to promise the glorious future of his people which he describes in verses 11 to 15.

The whole book of Amos is based on the special relationship the covenant relationship. We saw it a moment ago as we look back to chapter 3 verses 1 and 2. You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth.

What the Lord is saying to Israel here in chapter 9 verse 7 is don't think that you have a monopoly on me. I'm the Lord of every nation. I'm the Lord of the whole earth.

[23 : 16] You're not the only people whose migration I've caused to happen. So don't assume that the privileges I have given to you as my covenant people absolve you from the responsibility of obeying me.

It's no good you saying well of course the Lord brought us into the promised land 700 years ago and we know that he's on our side come what may. I'm not on your side he's saying come what may.

What's important is not past privilege but present behavior. And this is just what verse 8 is going on to say. Behold the eyes of the Lord are aware.

What does he see? The kingdom protected by privilege? No. The sinful kingdom. And he says I will destroy it from the surface of the ground. So don't think you can look back to the exodus as a kind of magic protection.

What I'm looking for is godly character and godly behavior now. Now isn't that a message for the Christian church today? What the Lord looks for and values and cherishes is godly character and godly behavior now.

[24 : 28] It's no good a church looking back to the past to past blessings and assuming that past blessing will guarantee future blessing. I think a church like ours needs to be rather careful.

We could say for example look at how the Lord has blessed this church this fellowship ever since the 1950s when determined biblical and evangelistic ministry first came into the church St. George's Tron as we then were.

Well indeed praise god this church has known great blessing over many years but with past blessing comes present responsibility. we must keep at it therefore keep urging one another enthusiastically forward to keep on with our evangelism and our training to grow in godly living.

Past blessing is no guarantee of future blessing. This was something that John the Baptist saw so clearly in relation to his contemporaries in Israel.

Remember he said to them produce fruit in keeping with repentance. Don't think that you can say to yourselves we have Abraham as our father I tell you that from these very stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

[25 : 38] The unmistakable signs of conversion and election are moral. Repentance growth in godly behavior a demonstration of the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

These folk in Israel that Amos was speaking to were not like that. They might have been descended from Abraham by blood but they were strangers to godliness and that is why they were ripe for judgment.

Behold the eyes of the Lord are upon the sinful kingdom he says in verse 8 and I will destroy it from the surface of the ground. But now there comes a most important qualification.

This destruction is not going to be total. Look at that important word partway through verse 8. Except there's an exception.

God says I'm going to destroy this sinful kingdom except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob. And he goes straight on to explain what he means. Verse 9 For behold I will command and shake the house of Israel among all the nations as one shakes with a sieve but no pebble shall fall to the earth.

[26 : 54] So the Lord here uses a very simple illustration from the gardener's potting shed. Do you like potting sheds? When I was a young boy growing up in Hertfordshire we had a greenhouse and a potting shed.

And this potting shed was full of all sorts of old fashioned tools. You know how things can lurk around the place for decades. There were great scythes as tall as me for cutting the grass.

There were bagging hooks and oil cans and petrol for the lawn mower. What boy can grow up with petrol in the potting shed and never use it occasionally? For purposes for which it was never intended.

But we also had in our potting shed a sieve, a circular sieve about 18 inches in diameter. And John Gilbert, who was our poultryman and gardener, used to sieve the earth in the springtime so that he could get fine soil for seed trays in which he could plant the seeds of vegetables and flowers.

And I used to watch him, I was quite young, but I used to watch him sieving the soil. So he would put a shovel full of rough soil into the sieve and then he would shake the sieve backwards and forwards and up and down until all the fine soil had fallen through into the tray underneath and nothing was left in the sieve except pebbles which were then thrown away.

[28 : 14] Sieving the soil is a simple process designed to separate what is good and useful from what has to be discarded. Now this is the Lord's method in verse 9 to sift and to separate.

Verse 9 is there to explain the final phrase in verse 8. God is not going to destroy everybody in Israel, only those who, well verse 10 describes who they are.

All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword who say disaster shall not overtake or meet us. They are the pebbles to be discarded, the ones who say everything is well.

All this talk of coming judgment is just Amos letting off a bit of hot air. What silly nonsense this prophet talks. We're familiar today, aren't we, with this strange phenomenon of Holocaust denial.

People who try to make out that the Nazis didn't murder millions of Jews in the concentration camps in the war. It seems extraordinary to us, doesn't it, that anybody should deny something for which there is so much historical evidence.

[29 : 23] Well, the phenomenon here in verse 10 is not Holocaust denial, it's judgment denial. People who say, God is not going to judge, he's not going to call us to account, all this talk about a coming judgment is fantasy.

But verse 10 here takes us right to the heart of Jesus' message as well as Amos'. Remember Jesus' words on exactly this subject?

He said, just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. In the days of Noah, they were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, right up to the day when Noah entered the ark, and then the flood came and destroyed them all.

Likewise, Jesus went on, just as it was in the days of Lot. They were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all.

So will it be, says Jesus, on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. In other words, the final judgment will happen when people are least expecting it.

[30 : 35] If you were to go out to Stocky Hall Street on a Saturday morning when lots of people are shopping there, and if you were to stop a hundred shoppers and ask them if they believed that divine judgment was coming to the world, how many would say yes?

Some would, but my guess is that most people would look at you as if you were a duck-billed platypus. What an extraordinary thing to ask, judgment.

But according to our verse 10, the ones who will be judged are the judgment deniers. But the understanding that judgment is coming is the heart of the gospel.

Jesus has come precisely to save us from the judgment. That's the good news. So a person who denies that judgment is coming will not see any need to come to Jesus.

A person who denies judgment is somebody who is asserting autonomy. I'm in charge of my own life. I'm not accountable to anybody, least of all to an invisible God. God. So when Amos speaks of this separation, this distinction between good soil and pebbles, he's expressing the distinction that runs right through the Bible, right from the days of Cain and Abel, back at the beginning of Genesis, down to the separation of the sheep and the goats, which Jesus the king will make at the end.

[32 : 00] And in the case of Amos' contemporaries, we've been aware right the way through the book of Amos says that there are two sorts of people living in Israel at this time. There are the rich, powerful oppressors and there are those whom they oppress.

The people that Amos describes as the poor and the needy, as for example in chapter 8 verse 4. He describes them as the righteous back in chapter 2. So it's not all in Israel who will be overwhelmed by disaster.

It's the judgment deniers. And the judgment deniers of 2015 AD are surely in the same place as the judgment deniers of the 8th century BC.

There's no hiding from the God of truth. There's no protection in the Exodus or in any privileges of the past. But, thirdly, there is the glorious promise of a new world as Amos opens out the consoling and wonderful vision of verses 11 to 15.

Now let's first notice a point of grammar here as we turn to this final section. Verse 11, I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen. Verse 14, I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel.

[33 : 22] Verse 15, I will plant them on their land. Now there have been many I wills in the book of Amos up to this point and they've all been the I wills of judgment.

Look just at this chapter without looking any further. Look at verse 1, those who are left I will kill with the sword. Verse 2, from heaven I will bring them down. Verse 3, I will search them out, I will command the serpent.

Verse 4, I will command the sword. Those I wills express the unstoppable judgment of God. God is the judge, I will bring judgment on those who dare to rebel against me.

But the I wills of the last five verses of chapter 9 are equally unstoppable. God is expressing here a purpose that no one can thwart. God is saying I will bring a glorious restoration and salvation to everybody who belongs to me.

The twin pillars of the Bible are judgment and salvation and God is the irresistible doer of both of them. How then is this glorious prophecy to be fulfilled and when?

[34 : 39] Well let's look first at verses 11 and 12. In verse 11 God promises to restore and rebuild what he calls the tent or the booth of David.

Now King David, the great and famous King David, had died about 200 years before Amos' ministry in Israel. And God had given David a personal promise that his house, that is his family, his kingly line and dynasty, would endure forever.

But the royal house of David soon became very tattered and by Amos' day the kingdom had split into two. It had become Israel in the north and Judah in the south.

There was still a descendant of David on the throne of Judah but Israel was apostate, idolatrous, and ruled by someone who had no right to be its king. And the mess got even worse.

Soon after Amos' time, Israel indeed suffered judgment and punishment as Amos had prophesied and the Assyrians invaded and laid the land to waste. Judah limped on for another century or so and then the Babylonians came and sacked Jerusalem.

[35 : 50] The exile began in 587 BC and while the temple was rebuilt and the walls, some 60 or 70 years later, the Hebrew people were few in number, they were not well organized, their morale was poor, they'd lost their national independence.

They were barely a shadow of their former selves. But 500 years or so later, there was a meeting in Jerusalem. The story is told in the Acts of the Apostles chapter 15.

The year was about 45 AD. The Apostles Paul and Barnabas and Peter were all present. The chairman of this meeting was the Apostle James, Jesus' younger half brother.

It was an excited and tense and joyful meeting. Paul and Barnabas and Peter were all speaking, not all at once but I guess one after the other. But the three of them reported how large numbers of Gentiles were crowding into the infant church, coming to Christ as their Lord and Savior.

And the Jewish leaders here had to make decisions. Did these new Gentile Christians have to submit to the Old Testament regulations about circumcision and kosher foods and all those things?

[37 : 06] And at a critical moment in the meeting, James, the Lord's brother, the leader of the meeting, said this, Brothers, listen to me. Peter has told us how God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for his name.

And with this, the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written. And here James quotes Amos 9, 11 and 12.

After this, I will return. James quotes it a little bit freely. It's not quite the words we have here, but it's the same verses. After this, I will return, says James, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen.

I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.

So James, the apostle, the leader of the church, is teaching us how to understand Amos 9, verses 11 and 12. It's all about the birth of the International Church of Christ.

[38 : 11] The Church of Christ is the kingdom of David rebuilt and restored, including many Gentiles as well as Jewish believers. And the king is reigning. This is the enduring king of the enduring kingdom.

The king of David's line, Jesus, whose reign will never end, whose booth or tent will never collapse and need to be rebuilt, because as he says, even the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

So Amos 9, verses 11 and 12, began to be fulfilled after the death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus. And they are still being further fulfilled every day as more and more people, Jews and Gentiles, bow down to Jesus the king and submit to his mastery.

And verses 13 to 15 extend our view of God's glorious eternal kingdom even further. They are surely three of the most delectable verses in the whole Bible.

They speak of, I won't read them again, but look at them, they speak of satisfaction and joy and security and permanence. A land so productive that the plowman is overtaking the reaper and the chap who's sowing the seed can't move quickly enough to keep ahead of the fellow who's treading out the grapes.

[39 : 30] It's a picture of super abundant productivity. This is the restoration of Eden. Gone are the thorns and the thistles and the drudgery and the hard labor.

The sweat and the pain, the backache and the bellyache, the aging and the dying. It's all gone. The earth now is being reborn and rebuilt. Solid, lasting cities, productive vineyards and gardens.

I will plant them on their land, says the Lord in verse 15, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them, says the Lord your God. And if he says it, will it happen?

Nothing can stop it happening. It's very striking that the first words of the book of Amos are the words of Amos. The last words of the book are, says the Lord your God.

Amos chapter nine brings the twin pillars of the biblical revelation to us, judgment and salvation. And of each of them, God says, I will.

[40 : 35] So the message of this book of Amos is a searching one, but ultimately it's a glorious one. It's a warning to the Lord's people not to be complacent.

A warning to us to avoid like the plague, self-indulgence and hedonism and immorality and social injustice and judgment denial. God will in the end bring his judgment upon all who assert their independence of him.

he is very patient, but he is not infinitely patient. But to those who belong to the tent of David, the tent once broken, but now being gloriously rebuilt under the lordship of Jesus Christ, his promise is, I will restore their fortunes, verse 14, and verse 15, I will plant them on their land.

They shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them. says the Lord, your God. Let's bow our heads and we'll pray together.

Dear God, our Father, please give to all of us a proper fear of your judgment. Write it in our hearts to long to please you and delight in you, to love you and to serve you as the Lord, our God, with all our heart and soul and mind and strength.

[42 : 06] And help us, dear Heavenly Father, to look forward with a growing sense of anticipation and joy to the fullness of your kingdom when finally you bring it in and make all your people part of it.

This kingdom that is so sweet and delightful and glorious. glorious, the kingdom of which you yourself are the center with the Lamb, the Lord Jesus beside you.

So fill our hearts, we pray, with praise, with anticipation, with love and with the spirit of hard work so that we can work for the kingdom. And we ask it all to the glory of Jesus' name.

Amen.